

Congressman Elijah E. Cummings (D-MD) & Congressman Ted S. Yoho (R-FL)  
Veterans Affairs Committee Member Day Testimony  
September 9, 2019

Chairman Takano and Ranking Member Roe,

It is critically important that we protect student veterans who are using their benefits earned through the Post-9/11 GI Bill. This is why we introduced the Safeguarding Student Veterans Act, H.R. 4012. Our bipartisan bill will help make sure that student veterans are not harmed by troubled schools, including those operating for profit, by increasing coordination between the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Education.

Around the country, including in Maryland and in Florida, many colleges, especially those operating for profit have recently shut their doors. These closures have had devastating impacts on students and, in particular, tens of thousands of student veterans who were aggressively targeted for enrollment by these schools.

Students who receive Post-9/11 GI Bill benefits made up a disproportionately large share of students at many of these for-profit schools when they closed. ITT Technical Institute had around 7,000 of its 40,000 students receiving these benefits and Education Corporation of America had about 4,000 student veterans out of 18,000 students.

When these colleges close, student veterans are robbed of their education and a chance to better themselves.

We must do better for our veterans.

The Safeguarding Student Veterans Act will require the Department of Veterans Affairs and the Department of Education to coordinate in order to protect student veterans. The bill will also make sure that the Department of Veterans Affairs has a better understanding of the risks that certain schools pose to veterans, and that veterans have access to this important information when choosing which school to enroll in.

Specifically, when a school has significant financial and compliance issues and is placed on Heightened Cash Monitoring status by the Department of Education, the bill requires that the information that schools hand over to the Department of Education will also be shared with the Department of Veterans Affairs.

The Department of Veterans Affairs would then perform a risk analysis for these schools. The risk analysis would include information the Department of Veterans Affairs receives from the Department of Education as well as additional factors such as the volume of student complaints, rates of Federal student loan defaults by veterans, and veteran completion rates.

This coordination between agencies and better understanding of the risk posed by these schools will help empower student veterans. The Department of Veterans Affairs would include the findings of the risk analysis as part of the Department of Veterans Affairs' online GI Bill Comparison Tool and notify veterans of the results of the risk analysis.

The Safeguarding Student Veterans Act is supported by leading organizations working to enhance educational opportunities for veterans including Student Veterans of America, American Legion, Veterans Education Success, Maryland Attorney General Brian Frosh, Vietnam Veterans of America, Higher Learning Advocates, and High Ground Veterans Advocacy.

We ask for the Veterans Affairs Committee's support for this important piece of legislation.